

## Enhancing the Volunteer Experience: Understanding Motivation and Commitment

*Commitment cannot be imposed from the outside, any more than motivation can. The depth of commitment that makes a volunteer willing to face social isolation or physical danger and give up leisure, prosperity, or even life itself must come from deep within the individual.*  
Paul J. Isley

People volunteer for many different reasons. Many studies are devoted to determining why people volunteer but often those studies are limited and do not truly portray the complexity of human motivation. Understanding this complexity can be advantageous to volunteer administrators as they make decisions about task assignments, reward and recognition, and many other facets of program structure. In the same vein, commitment is uniquely individual and sometimes misunderstood. Both impact a volunteer's experience with the organization and both will be discussed in this chapter. After discussing a few of the current theoretical perspectives on motivation and commitment, we will examine them from the actual descriptions of the volunteers themselves.

### Volunteer Motivation

First, let's look at a few of the current theories in human motivation and volunteer motivation particularly. On the following page is a visual diagram of these theories for comparison.

## J. R. Kidd

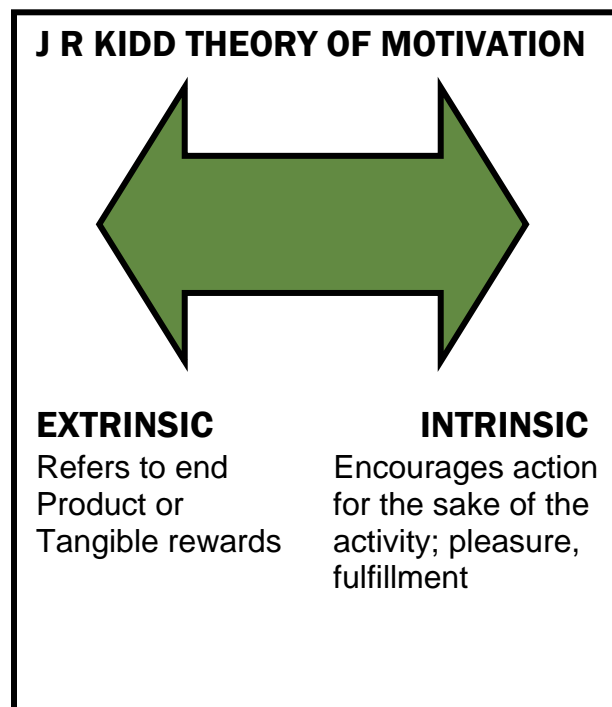
The first theory describes the classic intrinsic/extrinsic motives where the intrinsic motives include those that encourage an individual to act “for the sake of the activity, such as the pleasure gained from the act of volunteering, the opportunities, the socialization with peers, or the sense of fulfillment. Extrinsic motives refer more to the end product or tangible reward one receives such as pay, a recommendation on a resume, or outward recognition.

## Wlodkowski

Wlodkowski examines adult motivation in a way that can be applied to volunteer settings. He has identified six aspects of motivation to consider when designing programs: 1) attitudes influence behavior, 2) needs promote desire, 3) stimulation maintains attention, 4) affect motivates behavior, 5) competence builds confidence, and 6) reinforcement enhances learning.

## Fitch

One of the theories on motivation that is referred to often in volunteer literature is Fitch’s three categories of motivation: Altruistic, Egoistic, and Social. Altruistic motives involve helping others; egoistic refers to the goal of increasing skills, knowledge, and self-esteem; and social motives involve seeking out social affiliations and activities.



### FITCH'S THREE CATEGORIES OF VOLUNTEER MOTIVATION

#### ALTRUISTIC

Motives defined with the goal of increasing the welfare of others.

#### SOCIAL

Motives through which people seek out social affiliations and activities

#### EGOISTIC

Motives that have a goal of increasing the skills, knowledge, self-esteem of the individual.

### WLODKOWSKI'S SIX ASPECTS OF ADULT MOTIVATION

#### ATTITUDES INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR

Attitudes provide cues about what behavior is best in a given situation. These attitudes change as we grow and mature. Volunteer administrators should develop a flexible approach that takes into account the evolving nature of attitudes.

#### NEEDS PROMOTE DESIRE

Needs are internal forces that lead to goal attainment. Needs change as goals are reached. An effective administrator will consider ways of recognizing and meeting the needs volunteers have when they join an organization.

#### STIMULATION MAINTAINS ATTENTION

Examples of stimulation include surprise, interest, excitement as well as provocation, frustration and irritation. Administrators will want to find ways to increase a volunteer's interest and involvement.

#### AFFECT MOTIVATES BEHAVIOR

The way a volunteer is committed affects their emotions and these emotions determine their behavior. A volunteer administrator who wants to motivate volunteers will help them maintain positive emotions.

#### COMPETENCE BUILDS CONFIDENCE

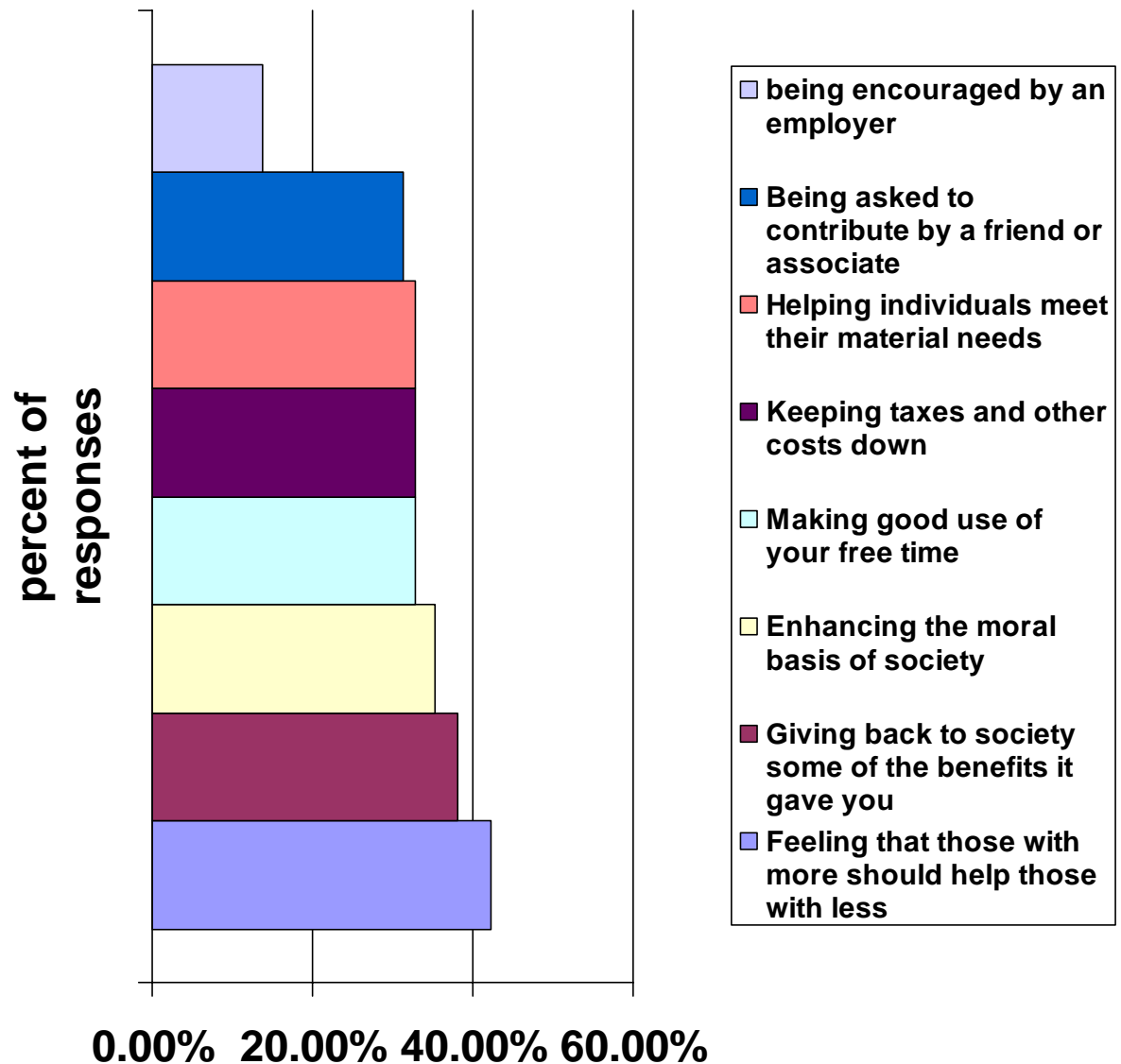
When a person is aware of their competence, this awareness has a powerful influence on behavior. Volunteer administrators can implement forms of learning and plans of action that both recognize and increase volunteers' competence.

#### REINFORCEMENT ENHANCES LEARNING

Learning promotes interest, personal growth, and pleasure. Reinforcement, in turn, promotes learning. Reinforcement in the form of honest appraisal and feedback allows the volunteer the chance to know their strengths and weaknesses.

Now let's look at reasons volunteers give for volunteering. This information is derived from polling groups and individual interviews.

The Independent Sector conducted a poll to determine the reasons people gave money and time to nonprofit charitable organizations. The results are illustrated below.



Paul J. Ilsley reported actual volunteer quotes on motivation from transcripts of interviews with volunteers. The following are samples taken from his book, *Enhancing the Volunteer Experience*.

### **MOTIVES OF FUN OR A CHANGE OF PACE**

“It seems like a nice change. Working in a center is a lot of fun and got me out of some ruts.”

### **HUMANITARIAN MOTIVES**

“It’s my belief in helping others in need.”

“I have a lot of sympathy for the families of the folks with cancer and I try to help out where I can.”

### **IDEALISTIC AND SPIRITUAL MOTIVES**

“You might say I have a love of justice and hatred for injustice.”

### **OTHER-DIRECTED MOTIVES**

“I had no idea so many people can’t read. When I heard about it on the television, I was talked into it right then and there.”

### **PERSONALITY-BASED MOTIVES**

“I’m the kind of person who always stops to help someone with a flat. I guess you could call me a compassionate person.”

### **REPAYMENT MOTIVES**

This whole neighborhood is like family to me. We watch out for each other and help out all the time.”

### **SELF-ENHANCEMENT MOTIVES**

“I have personal interests in learning about the city. Working here allows me to do a lot of that.”

“I can learn so much!”

### **SOCIAL MOTIVES**

“It gives back to me..in the relationships with the people that I talk to”

“Friendships have come out of it.”

## MOTIVES OF ELIMINATION OF NEGATIVE FEELINGS

“I can do this, or I can stay at home and wither away.”

One of the most important points that these findings revealed is that motivations of volunteers tend to change over time and within situations. As the volunteer comes into the group and begins to go through the group cycle, their ideas about joining and initial motivation change due to socialization. Refer back to the group cycle discussed in chapter one. Understanding this process is a key element in motivating volunteers not only to join an organization but to stay with it. Additional suggestions on keeping volunteers motivated and more committed are listed at the end of this chapter after the discussion of commitment.

## Volunteer Commitment

Scholars have defined organizational commitment in many ways using different criteria. One of the first questions asked about motivation and commitment is how they differ. Commitment is different from motivation in that it does not entail overt action, while motivation must. For example, you may be committed to an ideology of supporting animal rights but fail to join demonstrations or support any other form of action to express your commitment.

Organizational commitment definitions, as a general concept, can be categorized in three areas: attitudinal, behavioral, and social. Listed in the following box are examples of each of these, as well as two definitions by authors of volunteer literature.

## Definitions of Commitment

### ATTITUDINAL

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“The relative strength of an individual identification with and involvement of an organization characterized by three factors: 1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values; 2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and; 3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization.” Mowday, Porter, and Steers

### BEHAVIORAL

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“Whenever people act, their actions may become binding if those actions occur in a context of high choice, high irreversibility, and high visibility.” Weick

### SOCIAL

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“Commitment is the social aspect of organizational action.” Brunnsen

### VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

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“A state of being in which one is bound morally, emotionally, and/or intellectually to some entity of idea. Commitment or loyalty determines the object upon which actions are focused. In turn, commitment is shaped by values and beliefs. To understand commitment, one must discover both the object or objects of commitment and the reasons(values) that caused the commitment to occur.” Ilsley

“A committed volunteer is one who ‘develops an enduring attachment to, and a responsibility toward, a particular cause and organization.’ Fischer & Schaffer

## Utah Arts Council Study

The Community Development program, in conjunction with a Weber State University thesis project by this author, conducted a volunteer commitment study in May 1998 entitled, *Volunteer Commitment: a study of volunteers in Utah arts and cultural nonprofit organizations*. The purpose of this study was to examine commitment and those contributing factors which enhance or generate commitment—from a volunteer’s perspective. A random sample of thirty volunteers from over 300 arts and cultural organizations throughout the state of Utah were interviewed. The results of this study will give you a closer look at how volunteers view commitment. Implications of these views will assist volunteer administrators in their understanding of what they can do to increase the commitment of volunteers to their organization’s mission.

### *A Volunteer's Definition of Commitment*

When the volunteers were asked to define commitment, the following answers were included as part of their definition: (percentage of respondents who used this as part or all of their definition in parentheses throughout all three questions)

- Willing to do what's expected of you and follow through (57%)
- A belief in the organization and its mission or goals (27%)
- Giving of your time/money for the organization (20%)
- Volunteering and being there (14%)
- Having a real passion or interest in the arts (9%)
- Loyalty (9%)
- Interest in learning (9%)
- Volunteering to better your community (6%)

Likewise, when asked to list some of the ways a volunteer communicates commitment, the following responses were given. Notice that the responses fall into both attitudinal and behavioral type of commitment.

- Do what is expected of you and follow through (46%)
- Show up for assignments and go to meetings (40%)
- Give of time and/or money (26%)
- Advocate organization to others (23%)
- Exhibit a positive attitude (9%)
- Go the extra mile (6%)
- Other (9%)

The final question asked respondents to identify factors or qualities that contributed to their commitment within the organization. You will want to pay particular attention to these factors as they directly relate to a volunteer's reason's to stay with an organization.

- Belief in the organization's mission and goals (40%)



- Personal growth opportunities/learning new things (29%)
- Desire to give back to the community (26%)
- Love/passion for the arts (23%)
- General satisfactions in helping others and doing what's right (23%)
- Quality of the people you work with (14%)
- Love/enjoyment of the job or assignments (9%)
- Other (11%)

#### Analysis and Implications

Perhaps the most important aspect of this study are the implications of the results to a volunteer administrator who is attempting to understand how commitment can be nurtured and the volunteer's experience enhanced. Here are a few to consider:

1. **Emphasize accountability.** Committed volunteers expect accountability from both themselves and others. Most of the respondents felt that it is not enough to merely show up and be a "warm body."
2. **Promote membership issues.** A volunteer's identification with the values and mission of the organization contributes greatly to their commitment. This identification is part of the membership issues in the group cycle and may change over time.
3. **Be time sensitive.** Time was viewed as a real commodity perhaps due to the fast-paced, high tech society we live in today. Consideration needs to be made of the scarcity of leisure time people have. Administrators can be more conscious of this with more precise planning, more career and talent-specific projects, and more flexible time offerings.
4. **Recognize all forms of commitment.** Intensity of commitment was not measured by the length of time a volunteer spends with an organization.
5. **Avoid an "elitist" image—invite diversity.** A volunteer does not necessarily need to be lover of art to be committed to the mission of an arts organization.
6. **Make assignments challenging and offer learning opportunities.** Personal growth and learning was a strong contributing factor to commitment.

7. **Understand individual motivation and commitment.** The unique individuality of commitment was revealed by the lack of pattern in logical pattern expectations. Through questioning and observation, volunteer administrators can try to understand the nature of an individual's personal commitment to their organization.

## Get Inside Their Heads! Another view:

An excellent article published in *Who Cares* entitled, "Handle with Care," examines the modern volunteer. The author, Sarah Schafer, states that today's volunteers "are different than the stay-at-home mothers with flexible schedules. Many managers are finding that if they get inside their volunteers' heads, learn what makes them tick, and then give them what they want, the organization gets what it needs." She found six characteristics that define the modern volunteer.

1. **Volunteers want to see impact.** Even if you only need volunteers to help on the periphery of your organization, it is important to demonstrate to them that your organization accomplishes its goals and that volunteers won't be wasting their time.
2. **Volunteers want to get ahead.** High school and university student volunteers want to pad their resumes. Slightly older volunteers use the experience and training they gain to land better jobs.
3. **Volunteers want positive reinforcement.** If a volunteer does a good job, promote her/him! Of course, in order to promote volunteers from task to task, organizations who manage them must develop evaluation methods and job descriptions. Making expectations clear and then rewarding accomplishments with promotions, or even new experiences, will help keep fleeting attention spans in check.
4. **Volunteers crave order.** Chaos does not set well when you're a volunteer either. Learn to anticipate your volunteer's questions and hand out information packets even if they are only volunteering for one event or project.
5. **Volunteers want it short and sweet.** Today's volunteers favor short-term projects and lots of feedback. But according to Schafer, "there are ways to appease the short-term desires of volunteers while still satisfying your organization's need for long-term help." Getting an initial short-term commitment will often lead to more volunteering. Another creative way to use volunteers not interested in large commitments of time is through "virtual volunteering" on the internet for such things as on-line research for funding, etc., working on newsletters, or monitoring on-line support groups.
6. **Corporate Volunteers are different.** Corporate volunteering is one of the biggest trends today. Working with corporate partners is a "game of

managing expectations.” If your organization tends to be disorganized, or if you lack structured volunteer opportunities, you might be better off foregoing a corporate relationship.

## Recognition

Certainly recognition contributes immensely to a volunteer’s commitment. However, recognition is a tricky business because every volunteer’s recognition needs are different. In order to be effective and meaningful, recognition should be in congruence with a volunteer’s motivational needs. Successful recognition doesn’t just happen. It requires thoughtful and creative planning. Use the following worksheet to keep a record of support and recognition plans and past successes for each volunteer. Refer to your record often. Remember, these are not always specific to one volunteer. Many good forms of recognition can be offered to all your volunteers or to a group/team and still meet the needs of most.

Recognition should be a year round process that says thanks in multiple ways on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Having a recognition committee or sub-committee is an ideal way of distributing the significant workload of ongoing recognition.

Be careful not to get caught up in planning too many formal and tangible forms of recognition. Often, it is the more obscure forms that motivate and energize a volunteer such as offering advanced training, an especially challenging assignment, a special social invitation, or just listening when feedback or suggestions are offered. Many books have been written on ideas for recognition. The following list is a streamlined version of ideas, using Fitch’s three motivational categories, that seem appropriate for volunteers in arts/cultural organizations. Some of these ideas stem from the worksheet on the group cycle in chapter one and will refer to the particular phase of the cycle. A list of other resources is included in the resource section of this handbook.

Creativity and sensitivity to an individual’s needs are vital elements of recognition. Remember that needs can vary and no one volunteer has only one type of motivational needs. As you go through this list, think of someone you know well and have worked with. If you are sensitive to that person’s needs and personality, you will be able to look at these suggestions and know which ones would be appreciated by that person. Observation and conversation are keys to discovering a volunteer’s level of commitment and satisfaction.

### *Meeting Altruistic Motivational Needs:*

- Profile the volunteer/s and their unique contribution to the organization's mission and goals in the newsletter or newspaper.
- Be sure volunteer/s receive copies or hear anecdotal stories of how the programs are contributing to the welfare of others. You may want to organize a retreat or other event where sharing these stories would be appropriate.
- Recognize good ideas that will enhance the goals of the organization. If possible, attribute success to the volunteer/s who made the initial suggestion or implementation of these ideas.
- Have special rates or free tickets available to performances or art openings for volunteers within the organization. Let them experience what their hard work is doing for others.
- Involve the volunteer/s in planning sessions for events that will have an impact on others. (Goal Formation phase)
- Make sure every volunteer has a copy of the organization's volunteer philosophy. Post copies in appropriate places in your physical space. (Control Phase)
- Give volunteers annual updates of service accomplishments and impact data.
- Allow the volunteers to work with those you serve on a grass roots level where they can see some of the impact of your mission.

### *Meeting Social Motivational Needs*

- Build in windows of time before or after meetings for volunteers to socialize with each other.
- Assign the volunteer jobs that have opportunities for personal interaction with others.
- Plan social events, pot lucks etc with other volunteers for those who want to participate.

- Have the volunteer plan receptions or fundraising events before or after a performance or showing etc.
- Create job teams where several volunteers can work together and pool skills.
- Assign a veteran volunteer to mentor with a new volunteer and introduce the new recruit to the staff and others in the organization. (Membership Phase)

### *Meeting Egoistic Motivational Needs*

- Listen to the volunteer's suggestion/ideas and implement any plausible ideas or changes. (Goal Formation Phase)
- Offer opportunities for volunteer/s to increase skills or training. Certificates signifying the nature of training and accomplishments involved that can be used in a resume or reference are especially appreciated.
- Involve the volunteer in decisions and challenging assignments.
- Offer opportunities for the volunteer/s to have name connected with something in writing such as a book, article, etc.
- Recognize the professional skills and talents the volunteer brings to the organization. This can be done verbally as you introduce the volunteer, or in a newsletter or community newspaper.

# Volunteer Recognition Profile

[illegible]

## Sample Volunteer Recognition Profile

<b>Name of Volunteer</b>	John Artlover	
<b>Date Volunteer began volunteering</b>	27 June 1997	
<b>Positions, tasks, Committees volunteer has served on</b>	Fundraising banquet, financial committee, handled ticket sales, worked with artist outreach program	
<b>Input from observation &amp; others about motivational needs: (preference type)</b>	Likes to work on details, was especially adept at handling money, sometimes has a problem with change, Likes to work with children.	
<b>Special skills or Professional Education/experience:</b>	Past experience as an accountant MBA from University of Arizona Worked with YMCA for 10 yrs	
<b>MOTIVATIONAL NEED</b>	<b>POSSIBLE FORM RECOGNITION</b>	<b>WAYS/PLANS TO MEET NEEDS</b>
Likes to work on details	Certification Personal response To performance	Training on new finance system, database certification
Wants more challenging Assignments	Commend him on past performance	Give new assignment on the upcoming Festival-coordinator
Social needs-likes children	Special thank-you Letter from school	Assignment to help with school outreach
Leadership opportunities	Ask for input on Planning	Put as liaison on planning committee

